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Review of *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, by Hanan Eshel

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***The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, by Hanan Eshel. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008. xii + 208 pp. Paper. \$28.00.**

The purpose of this volume by the late Hanan Eshel is to “summarize the contributions of the scrolls to the understanding of the political history of the Hasmonean state” (p. 1). Eshel, an archaeologist, linguist, and historian who edited several manuscripts from the Judaean Desert finds and excavated in the region of Qumran, was committed to mining the Qumran scrolls for historical information, a position that has come into a certain amount of disfavor in recent scholarship. However, in this balanced and careful volume, Eshel demonstrates that the Qumran scrolls do contain nuggets of valuable information that add to our knowledge of the history of the Hasmonaean kingdom.

Eshel acknowledges that the task is not easy, and that the information gained is scant and open to disagreement. In his conclusion, he states, “the contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls towards the understanding of the political history of the Second Temple period is relatively marginal. Without Josephus’ accounts, it would have been impossible to decipher the meaning of the historical allusions documented in the scrolls. When presented with allusions to events not documented by Josephus, such as the executions in the days of Marcus Aemilius Scaurus . . . it is practically impossible to understand their exact meaning. However, these allusions still bear significance, serving as evidence that some of the details provided by Josephus on the history of the Hasmonean state are in fact correct” (p. 189). But any information

gained is worthwhile, and this book gathers together that information in an easily accessible format.

The book is arranged chronologically according to the historical events of the second and first centuries B.C.E. Chapter 1 discusses references to the reign of Antiochus IV and the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt. 4Q248 (4QHistorical Text), a remnant of an apocalyptic work that is probably related to the book of Daniel, lists a series of events associated with Antiochus IV’s two Egyptian campaigns in 170/169 and 168 B.C.E. The dispute that this small fragment clarifies is the question as to when Antiochus plundered the Temple treasury in Jerusalem. According to 1 Maccabees, this occurred after the first Egyptian campaign in 169 B.C.E. (1 Macc 16–25), but according to 2 Maccabees it happened after the second campaign in 168 (2 Macc 5:1–21). Daniel and Josephus state that he came to Jerusalem twice, after both campaigns. In 4Q248, the order of events is given according to the chronology of 1 Maccabees:

5. [And] the Lord shall cau[se] (his) spirit to go through their lands, and he shall r[eturn from Alexandria]
6. [and] come to Egypt and sell its land, and he shall com[e]
7. to the Temple City and seize it and al[l its treasures,]
8. and he shall overthrow lands of (foreign) nations and (then) return to Egyp[t]. (p. 15)

This text lends weight to the historical veracity of 1 Maccabees—that is, that Antiochus came to Jerusalem and looted the Temple between his two Egyptian campaigns. This is the type of historical information that can be gleaned from the fragmentary remains of the Scrolls.

Chapter 2, which may be of most interest to the general reader, concerns the formation of the movement that later resided at Qumran and deposited the Scrolls in the caves, and the identity of the Wicked Priest, the Teacher of Righteousness, and the Man of Lies. Eshel makes his arguments by bringing together references to these figures from the Damascus Document, the Pesher to Habakkuk, and the Pesher to Psalms. He also carefully considers the *Sitz im Leben* of 4QMMT, which he seems to consider a foundation document of the Essene movement. Since he is primarily concerned in this volume with the history of the Hasmonaean state and not of the Qumran sect, he does not give much space to the question of the identity of the movement itself, merely stating (on p. 39) that they were probably members of the Essene movement (with which this reviewer agrees). Eshel’s weaving together of sources to form a cohesive narrative is difficult work, and he is careful to distinguish what can and cannot be supported by the evidence. His conclusions, found on pp. 59–61, fall in line with what may be called the consensus position: the group at Qumran started as a conservative Jewish movement which began to form around 170 B.C.E. and was opposed to the Hellenizing priests in Jerusalem; Jonathan the

Maccabee should be identified as the Wicked Priest; the Teacher of Righteousness, who cannot be identified, tried to convince Jonathan to adopt the solar calendar and his group's legal positions; the Man of Lies, who also cannot be identified, was a leader of the Pharisees who opposed the Teacher, and Jonathan also came to oppose the Teacher and probably threatened his life. This reconstruction is the most plausible given the evidence available, and Eshel does a masterful job of marshaling the evidence and presenting a compelling case.

Chapters 3–5 deal with the reigns of John Hyrcanus and his sons Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus. The historical evidence found in the Scrolls for these reigns is more meager and subject to disagreement. For example, in chapter 3, Eshel discusses the identity of three figures found in the last lines of 4QTestimonia (4Q175):

22. he said, 'Cursed be the man who builds this city;
with his firstborn
23. shall he lay its foundations, and with his youngest shall he set up its gates.' And behold, a man
accursed, a man of Belial,
24. shall arise to be a fowl[er's sn]are to his people, and
destruction to all his neighbors. And he shall arise
25. [and appoint his sons to rule,] so that the two of
them will be instruments of violence. And they
will again build
26. [this city. And they will es]tablish for it a wall and
towers, to make a refuge of wickedness
27. [and a great evil] in Israel and a horrible thing in
Ephraim and in Judah (p. 65)

These lines are a part of a document called by its editor the *Psalms of Joshua* and by Eshel the *Deeds of Joshua* (p. 67). The identity of the figures is very controversial, the man of Belial being variously named as Mattathias the Hasmonean, Jonathan, Simon, John Hyrcanus I, and Alexander Jannaeus. Eshel carefully considers the arguments in favor of each figure before deciding that the passage refers to John Hyrcanus and his sons Aristobulus I and Antigonus. Eshel's argument, which depends on Josephus' account of the brief reign of Aristobulus I, is plausible, although given the cryptic nature of the text in question, it is difficult to be definitive. Where I found myself in disagreement with him was in his argument that the passage in question was *written* for 4QTestimonia, and only later added to the *Psalms (Deeds) of Joshua*. It seems to me unlikely that a scribe who has taken his three previous quotations from extant sources would suddenly manufacture a text to make his final point, especially when we have a perfectly good candidate for his source in the *Psalms of Joshua*. This is only an illustration of the kind of scholarly disagreement that can arise over the kind of historical reconstruction that Eshel is attempting.

Chapters 6–8 continue with the reigns of Alexander Jannaeus and his successors Salome Alexandra, Hyrcanus II, and Aristobulus II, and Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem

and his assassination. Chapter 9 discusses the term "Kit-tim," used at first as a sobriquet for the Greeks and later for the Romans, and why this necessary reinterpretation of the term used for the major enemy of the Jews may have had the effect of stopping the production of *pesharim*. A brief afterword summarizes all of Eshel's conclusions.

This volume, which will now unfortunately stand as a memorial to Hanan Eshel, does an artful and convincing job of gathering together all possible historical allusions in the Qumran scrolls, and should be read by anyone interested in the history of the late Second Temple period.

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